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ABSTRACT

By 1980, nearly 700 Hmong refugees had settled in Missoula Montana. Resettlement poses many problems for these people because, in addition to difficulties with language and separation from family and country, the Hmong have never dealt with urban institutions (banks, hospitals, welfare departments, apartment houses, or supermarkets). From the experiences of agencies and volunteer helpers, the suggestion arose that refugee assistance can be usefully divided into two phases: immediate resettlement (phase I) and long-term aid and integration into Montana communities (phase II). Considerations for phased planning focus on: English language, employment, community placement, relocation, cultural integrity and preservation, and mental health. Phase one language assistance consists of survival English and entry into formal oral training for children and some adults, while phase two is more concerned with reading and writing skills. In employment, entry level minimum wage jobs are secured for refugees under phase one, while phase two involves finding better paying, more stable, and skilled employment. In terms of community placement, under the first phase, services such as shopping and finding housing are done for refugees; phase two consists of encouraging the Hmong to help themselves. Relocation (when needed) consists of moving to other communities for better employment or to reunite with family or clan members. Helping refugees to maintain their cultural ties during phase one often means encouraging native arts, crafts, and celebrations; during phase two, emphasis is on long term preservation of cultural heritage. Finally, regarding mental health, those working with the Hmong must deal with anxiety, depression, and mourning in the first phase and then offer counseling and treatment for long range adjustment in phase two. (Author/GC)

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What To Do When the Smoke Clears: Stage I and Stage II Planning With Asian Refugees

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Planning and action must be accomplished quickly when assisting Asian refugees with resettlement needs. Because the immediate needs of refugees are pressing, volunteers and professionals have not been accustomed to separate programming for short-term and long-range needs. This paper focuses upon ways to plan and implement Stage I (immediate) and Stage II (long-range) activities, utilizing the experiences in Western Montana with Laotian-Hmong settlers for examples for replication in other small communities.

In the late 1970s, South Asians began to emigrate to the United Stated from refugee camps after having been driven from their homeland as a result of war. Rural communities responded spontaneously and thoughtfully. Sponsors, host families, and a variety of volunteers joined human service professionals in the resettlement and adjustment process. Innovative approaches were developed in such areas as English language training, consumer and home management skills, job training, cultural activities and employment.

Refugees and resettlement are an important part of the history of America, and we are sometimes described as a nation of immigrants. However, we have not always received outsiders graciously or planfully. From the indentured English servants of the 17th century to the undocumented Mexican migrant workers of the present, there has been exploitation and neglect.

The Asian refugees are unique culturally, as well as in the circumstances which brought them to the United States.

Southeast Asians, particularly the Hmong people, were of great assistance to the military during the Vietnam War, fighting alongside American soldiers and rescuing downed U.S. pilots at great risk to themselves. Those who survived were persecuted and driven from their country. They were officially invited to settle in the United States by the Government.

The Hmong of "Meo" people, as they were previously called, are the mountain people of Laos. They are rural people who live in clans and practice slash-and-burn agriculture and cattle breeding in the Highlands.[1]

By 1980, there were 746 refugees in Western Montana, and all but 68 were Hmong. They settled in Missoula, the trade center for the western part of the state, and Ravalli County, which is an agricultural area south of Missoula. Hmong chose to come to Montana because their tribal leader and General, Vang Pao, had elected to move there, and established homes in both countries.

Resettlement has posed tremendous problems for the Hmong people. Their life-style is primarily rural in nature, in which people rely upon each other within the clan. Although industrious and intelligent, their language is limited to verbal expression and they had little need for formal schooling or written language. With a self-sustaining life-style and economic structure, they were not experienced with urban institutions such as banks, hospitals, welfare

departments, apartment houses, or supermarkets.

All of their unique problems are not culturally related, of course. Most arrived in the United States after a transoceanic airplane trip. They were exhausted and had few, if any, financial resources. Many were separated from other family members and some older children arrived alone.

In Missoula, the International Refugee Commission Office served as the linkage between the refugee camps in Southeast Asia and Missoula. Fortunately, the director had lived and worked in the refugee cmaps and could anticipate needs of those who were coming.

Volunteer agencies, some churches, the welfare department, Public Health, school system and vocational training responded well, straining budgets and personnel to do so. The amount and utility of volunteer help was remarkable. Many local citizens had lived, worked or extensively visited in Laos, Vietnam and Thailand. Many were in the military, but a surprising number had been to Southeast Asia under the auspices of the Aid to International Development (AID), Peace Corps, business or industrial firms or had travelled extensively. These qualified volunteers were essentially filling out the resource base along with professional staff and other agency resources.

The Need for Phase I and II Planning

Out of the experiences of agency and volunteer helpers

with Asian refugees came the suggestion that planning and implementation of refugee assistance can be divided into immediate resettlement (Phase I) and long-term aid and integration into Montana communities.

The notion of phased planning began to crystallize in two community-wide workshops on refugee help which were held in 1980 and in 1981. Taft and Associates developed a three-phased framework for planning resettlement which includes: (1) travel to the U.S. from Southeast Asia, (2) initial placement, and (3) long-term resettlement.[2] The report is useful for providing a clear and detailed conceptual understanding of the entire process of resettlement.

The intent of the Phase I and Phase II scheme, as presented here, is to provide a practical framework for planning and action. It begins with the arrival of refugees at the site of relocation.

The chart on page 5 lists specific services or needs areas of refugees and categorizes Phase I (immediate) or Phase II (long-range) applications. Some of the differences cited are of course obvious, but others require more thought for detailed planning.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PHASED PLANNING

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Phase I language assistance consists of survival English for children and adults and entry into formal written and

Phased Planning for Asian Refugee Assistance

Defined Services or Needs Areas	Phase I - Immediate	Phase II - Long Range
English language training and ESL (English as a second language)	Survival English, beginning sounds, pronounciation, and meanings for children	Reading, writing English for adults and children
Employment	Entry or "best" level for able adults	Promotions, job relocation, advanced training
Community placement	(Doing for) Relocation assistance for housing, shopping, transportation, utilizing public and commercial services	(Doing with, doing for self) Providing technical assistance to refugees for self-help groups, developing cooperatives, businesses, etc.
Relocation (optional)	Immediate relocation to reunite families or provide economic opportunities	Later relocation for family reunification or better economic opportunity
Cultural integrity and preservation	Refugees perform or demonstrate crafts, dances, and celebrations in native style	Development, definition, and preservation of the "culture within a culture"
Mental health	Anxiety, depression, and mourning	Survivor guilt, long-term depression, marital conflict

oral language training for school-aged children and some selected adult groups. Of major concern is the fact that most Hmong have not been exposed to formal schooling nor have they begun to develop a written language in their native tongue until recently.

Therefore, immediate educational efforts must be directed towards assisting Hmong with the formal educational system as well as teaching language skills. The use of bilungual aids in the classroom greatly facilitates learning of the language and its meanings. Some teachers utilize a buddy system in which a native English speaking child and Hmong child work together in the classroom.

It has proven helpful to have a summer program for Hmong children to provide continuity for their education and socialization experiences gained during the school year.

There have been some full-time Phase I English language programs for newly-arrived refugees which resulted in participants refusing employment until training was finished. Some of the programs lasted a year or longer. In the Idaho resettlement program, most adult refugees have been placed into immediate employment and received concurrent language instruction outside of working hours. As a result, refugees are able to increase their wages more quickly than those who attend extensive, full-time language training prior to entering the labor market.[3]

In general, Phase I focuses upon verbal conversational

skill and the reading of necessary words and other symbols, such as traffic signs, to be able to negotiate the culture. Phase II education and training in English is more concerned with reading and writing skills. American literature can be introduced with the dual purpose of learning the written language and the historical base of the dominant culture and minority groups in America.

Another Phase II concern is to insure that those persons in the home who are not enrolled in formal language training receive tutoring or other appropriate training. Hmong elders, pre-school children, and home-bound adults are examples of those who are of concern. In Missoula, the use of in-home language training volunteers has been effective.

Employment

Securing entry-level jobs at the prevailing minimum wage has been a typical solution for employment of newly-arrived refugees.

Phase II action involves finding better paying and more stable employment commensurate with experience, job and language skills of the individual. Securing better jobs presents some difficulties. Changing jobs is not part of past cultural experience and must be carefully explained to Hmong workers. In many parts of the country there is high unemployment, and in some areas there is hostility against hiring "foreigners" rather than "Americans." Fortunately, most

Hmong have proven themselves to be competent, hard-working, dependable employees who have received promotions and paved the way for other refugee workers.

The Trapper Creek Job Corps Center in Western Montana has been effective in training and placing young adult refugees in high paying, skilled trades. The residential training center operation allows students to learn English language, core academics and receive vocational training all within an integrated program.

Long term considerations should include extreprenuerial possibilities as well as individual jobs. For example, a tree-thinning and firewood operation and a cooperative farm on leased land are presently being attempted by Hmong settlers near Missoula.

Some refugees in Western Montana are relocating to Billings in the Southeast part of the state where there is more employment and economic growth.

Community Placement

It is important for professionals and volunteer helpers to distinguish the appropriateness of "doing for," "doing with" and "doing for themselves" when working with refugees.

When they first arrive, many things must be done "for" refugees. The basic physical necessities and transportation must be provided. Very soon assisting shifts to doing "with" in such ways as helping secure a social security card, learning

to drive or use public transportation, and applying for work or public assistance programs.

Within a few months, Asian refugees begin to do more things for themselves and each other, which requires only occasional technical assistance from professional and volunteer helpers. The establishment of advisory committees made up of Asian people, professionals and volunteers facilitates coordination of services and increased independence of refugees.

In a proposal to the state of Nebraska, five Asian families would have received eight weeks of intensive residential training to allow them to become acculturated and to accelerate the development of the Asian community or clan group. Training objectives included: (1) to learn about American culture while preserving the culture of origin (to become bicultural), (2) to learn about the range of formal and informal resources (to become a resource facilitator) (3) to learn how to organize self-help and educational groups (to become a leader and educational facilitator).

Unfortunately, the project was not funded thereby denying the opportunity to discover if the program would have been useful for making the resettlement process more efficient while encouraging self-determination by refugees.

Relocation

An optional Phase II possibility with some refugee

families and individuals is relocation to other communities. The usual reasons for moving are to find better employment or to reunite with family or clan members. Social agencies can assist by determining the actual availability of employment and the costs and suitability of housing, schools and other key amenities to help Asian families make informed decisions about relocation.

Cultural Integrity

The cultural adaptation of refugees changes rapidly from the beginning of initial re-settlement through Phase II. Out of their concern for trying to understand the culture of the Hmong, professionals often lose sight of the fact that culture is not static, but ever-changing, due to circumstances and conditions under which people live in any society. The notion of cultural materialism[5] emphasizes that many customs are not just quaint, but have relevance for everyday life.

The reliance of the Hmong upon both medicine and herbal cures may be an adaptation to available medical resources in the environment rather than a sign of cultural resistance to modern medical technique. In fact, refugees have readily utilized Western medicine when the reasons for procedures or medications have been explained and understood by them.

The Hmong have enthusiastically demonstrated crafts, dancing and music for community groups. They hold traditional

celebrations to which they invite their "American" neighbors.

They are also rapidly getting acculturated to American ways, while holding onto many traditions and maintaining family ties.

The Hmong are certainly not culturally fragile. In their homeland, they lived in the Highlands somewhat apart from the dominant culture of Laos. Since 1960 they have maintained physical and cultural survival in spite of the Southeast Asian wars.

Perhaps the most important cultural value is allegiance to the family and clan above self and all other concerns, within a patri-lineal family structure.[6] In terms of resettlement, the male-dominated Hmong clan produces both positive resources as well as problems.

The "family" has provided a recognized, dependable resource for the newly-arrived refugee who finds himself in an otherwise unfamiliar environment. Lao family community groups are being established in communities where there are sizable numbers of Hmong residents. These groups provide for such functions as preserving the culture, mutual aid and support, and cooperative business ventures. Of some concern is the fact that all the power is vested in one leader or a council of a few males upon whom the community is dependent for good judgement. There are conflicts concerning the roles of women, also. In order to survive, both spouses may have

to work, which erodes the power of the men. As women participate more in American life, they are influenced by the current movement for women's rights, which accelerates the conflict between traditional Hmong and modern American values. It is clearly the lot of the Hmong man to suffer the confusion, change, and benefits of women's equality along with his native-born American brother.

Mental Health Issues

A 1980 survey conducted with three-fourths of the Asian refugees in Western Montana revealed that the Hmong reported no mental health problems.[7] Serious problems cited by the refugees related to immediate practical issues, such as English language training, employment, job training and transportation. These findings correlated with those of a psychiatrist who has treated many Asian refugees for emotional problems. His experience indicates that serious manifestations of such symptoms as survivor guilt, depression, and marital conflict may show up as much as five years after arrival to the United States.[8]

Whether or not refugees have immediate emotional problems, they apparently focus upon immediate situational needs rather then mental health concerns. Counseling and treatment may be more appropriate for programming in Phase II, since refugees report symptoms and are amenable to help somewhat later in resettlement.

IMPLEMENTING PHASE I AND II PLANNING IN RURAL AREAS

The experience in Western Montana points towards the need to orchestrate formal services together with volunteers and informal resources. Technical information was gained by consulting established programs around the country in the areas of immediate settlement needs, language training, employment, job training, cultural background, and mental health issues. In many cases, the most useful information came from programs in large metropolitan areas. Their programs had to be greatly altered to be utilized in rural communities on a smaller scale. Any activities that were considered for adoption had to be capable of rapid implementation because the needs of the Asian people were great and the government at the federal and state levels mandated rapid assistance and maximum independence. As the Montana State refugee plan stated, any program must "promote effective resettlement" and "encourage rapid economic self-sufficienty."[9]

In the development of Stage I and II planning, there may be more resources in this small community than it first appears. In Western Montana, only three small agencies existed for refugee assistance. However, more than twenty social and educational agencies have one or more mandated programs to assist refugees. In addition, churches and other private organizations also offer substantial aid as refugee

sponsors, English language tutors, and training for volunteers.

Three coordinating and planning entities also developed in Missoula. The Oversight Committee is composed of representatives of public and private agencies having the most responsibility for refugee assistance. The Lao Family Community, Inc. is run by the refugee community and collaborates with all groups and individuals who are concerned with Asian refugees. The Indochinese Support Group was originally begun by church-related volunteers and eventually assumed a recruiting and training function for community volunteers.

The development and dissemination of knowledge is a major consideration for planning and implementation of programs. A variety of training materials have been rapidly developing since 1975, particularly in the areas of language training, cultural understanding, social services, mental health issues, and volunteering.[10]

The Western Montana Teaching Center established a library of materials of interest to teachers of Hmong students and collaborated with the University of Montana Social Work Department to expand the sources to include social services and volunteering. The resource library is open to everyone in the community, and provides a central place to store and use informal locally-developed materials in addition to professional books and pamphlets.

Summary

Assistance to Asian refugees can be greatly enhanced by a phased planning process which considers immediate and long-range needs. The suggested service or needs areas described in this paper could be modified or expanded and only reflect the situation in our locality.

The experience in Western Montana clearly indicates that there are more formal and informal resources for aiding resettlement than it appears. Each rural area will have its own set of resources and limitations that are unique. Part of the Phase I and II process is to clearly determine what specific resources are available and how best to access them.

A final reason for focused effort with Asian refugees is that the people are able to make great gains with any useful assistance offered them. One Hmong community leader stated the position of the refugees well: "We need lots of help--but most of all, we need your friendship and understanding. In return, we can only offer you ours, and a common will to work for the good of the United States and her citizens."[11]

NOTES

1. Van Tou Fu, "The Hmong of Laos," An Introduction to Indochinese History, Culture, Language, and Life, John K. Whitmore, (ed.), (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 1979) 93-94.

2. Taft, Julia V., et al., Refugee Resettlement in the U.S.: Time for a New Focus, (Washington, D.C.: New Trans-Century Foundation, 1979), 29-31.

3. Interview with Beth Kincaide, Idaho Refugee Service Center, Boise, Idaho, Feb. 26, 1981

4. Robert Deaton and John Spores, Asian Refugee Family Training Program Proposal, University of Montana, Missoula, June 1980.

5. Marvin Harris, Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches: The Riddles of Culture and Cannibals and Kings, (New York: Random House, 1974).

6. Van Tou Fu, op cit., 99.

7. Mental Health Region V, Indo-Chinese Refugee Conference, Missoula, Montana, 1980.

8. David Kinsey, M.D., Address at the Asian Refugee Conference, Missoula, Montana, Feb. 21, 1981.

9. Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, Montana Plan for the Refugee Program, (Helena, Montana, 1980), 1.

10. For example: National Indochinese Clearinghouse, 3520 Prospect St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007, and Indochinese Social Service Outreach Program, Traveler's Aid Society, 327 South LaSalle St., Chicago, Ill. 60604.

11. Muacha K. Cherpao, "Indochinese Reguees in Montana" (unpublished paper), Missoula, Montana, April 1980, 13.